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SUBJECT: PRESS ACCREDITATION FOR POPE'S VISIT TO ISTANBUL

¶1. (SBU) The Turkish press today carried a story accusing the Ecumenical Patriarchate of trying to usurp the government's role by issuing press credentials to reporters covering the Pope's visit later this month. According to the story, members of the press must receive accreditation both from the General Directorate of Media and Information (BYEGM) in the Prime Minister's office and separately from the Patriarchate to be admitted to the Patriarchate and an off-site press center. Papers quoted BYEGM Director Izzet Ibrikcioglu as saying its accreditation should be sufficient. Patriarchate representative Paul Gikas, on the other hand, explained that limited space, particularly in the relatively small St. Georges Church on the Patriarchate grounds, required limiting access. Gikas suggested the use of the word "registration" might be more accurate than "accreditation."

¶2. (SBU) According to Gikas, the Patriarchate plans to establish a Press Center at the Hilton Hotel with a pool camera feed and standard press facilities. The Pope will be traveling with 70 members of the press from the Vatican. The Vatican has requested that 25 of these traveling press be given access to the events at the Fener church. The Patriarchate plans to select another 25 from registration applications received for access to the Patriarchate grounds and church. Gikas said the accreditation by the BYEGM was required for registration with the Patriarchate; all those accredited by the BYEGM would be registered and given access to the Press Center in the Hilton. He noted that Patriarchate Director of Communications the Very Reverend Dositheos Anagnostopoulos had discussed these arrangements with the Governor of Istanbul Muammer Guler (note: the Governor is responsible for security).

¶3. (U) November 14 was the closing date for filing applications for press credentials with the BYEGM; the Patriarchate is accepting applications until November 20, according to the web site, www.patriarchate.org.

¶4. (SBU) Comment. It's not unusual that the media should focus on media arrangements in connection with the Papal visit, but the angle of this story - and its implicit suggestion that this is yet another way for the Patriarchate to establish its independence from the Turkish state - is further indication of the continued high sensitivity regarding the Pope's upcoming visit. End comment.
JONES